

Living, as I did, very much within the Czechoslovak community in exile in London, Otec Lang and the Farm Street Catholic church were an indivisible part of my childhood – though I hardly realised, or even fully appreciated it then. For instance, I did not always relish ‘going to school’ seven days per week including Czech school on Saturdays. Yet the Saturday school he established helped to forge a sense of identity with a distant land I never visited until adulthood. The Czech flag by the church altar was a significant symbol in terms of loyalty and allegiance to the country my parents had erroneously expected to return to within a few years, and the national costumes worn by some children were a source of unchristian envy on my part, since I loved my national heritage thus displayed.

The church and associated activities were an ‘open house’, to which the welcome was warm and genuine. As I write, I have before me a mounted portrayal of a beautiful, benevolent Virgin Mary transcending the world, and a small pendant of her, received long ago. Although I am a Hussite by birth, Otec Lang drew no divisive lines; we were all ‘his flock’, and he still patted my adult cheek many years later.

I, like my late mother, had the greatest respect for Otec Lang, his pastoral care, his sense of fun, but also regarding his immense compassion; his twinkling, smiling blue eyes veiled the suffering he endured, both in Terezín and due to life itself. I have known only one other person like him – the Rabbi conducting a wedding under a canopy in an Upper Galilee kibbutz. They could almost have been twins, physically and ideologically. I am still learning the humanitarian lessons they would wish us to observe, and not treat our fellow men/women as somehow ‘the other’. I hope I will not let them down.